

TRAP-ED IN THE CITY

An Action Research Study on the Impact of Emdin's "Reality Pedagogy" in the Urban Music Classroom

Lauren Bowers

Advisor: Dr. Frank Martignetti
Music Education Program, School of Education
University of Bridgeport, Bridgeport, CT

PROBLEM

Many music educators view diversity as a challenge, rather than an inevitable reality or even an advantage. Those who view diversity in this way see, usually unconsciously, their experience, perspectives, and values as the standard against which those who are different must be measured.

The many types of popular music in American youth culture today are treated, by most music educators, with either benign neglect or outright contempt. Not surprisingly, many students have come to view "school music" with the same feelings. A change in our practice is needed to ensure that 21st century American youth are given space at the table to exchange thoughts and ideas regarding the popular music culture that is a large part of their daily life.

BACKGROUND

As a teacher in a Title 1 school, I was armed with a pedagogy based in values that neither resembled the experiences of my students nor the realities of their daily lives. In efforts to bridge this divide, I discovered Chris Emdin's book *For White Folks Who Teach in the Hood...and the Rest of Ya'll Too*. In it he explained his *reality pedagogy* and the use of *cogenerative dialogues* to bring both teacher and student together as facilitators in the learning process. Emdin's work echoed the sentiments of Reuben Gaztambide-Fernandez and *cultural production*. Armed with both, I sought to tackle the problematic separation between my students and I.

Reality pedagogy (n.): "an approach to teaching and learning that has a primary goal of meeting each student on his or her own cultural and emotional turf. It posits that while the teacher is the person charged with delivering the content, the student is the person who shapes how best to teach that content." (Emdin, 2016, p.27)

Cogenerative dialogues (i.e. cogen) (n.): "in their purest form, are structured dialogues about the inner workings of the social field participants coinhabit." (Emdin, 2016, p.66)

Cultural production (v.): "the active engagement in reorganizing the symbolic content of our social being." (Fernández, 2011, p.36)

QUESTIONS

1. How might I build a course that utilizes cultural production through cogenerative dialogue?
2. What effect might this have on my students? On myself? What implications might it have for the music education profession?

Method



Action Research

Action research is a self-evaluative process that identifies personal paradigms, allowing space to shift those paradigms if necessary, and develop a personal, teacher identity

"I'd like to make a toast. Ever since Honors Band, ya' know, it really changed my life. Every depression, every sad day, I would get on the piano and play my heart out. Ya' know I would cry – tears all over my keyboard (laughter). But it's still good, man. A lot more happy and I'd like to thank Ms. Bowers 'cuz without her we wouldn't be here right now. CHEERS TO HONORS BAND!"

"Well it helps me to learn that I might be different on the outside, but I'm more than what I think I am in the inside. And I can express myself when I'm doing what I love most – playing the violin. And it's taught me not to listen to the bad, such as bullies, but to always use my super power of always being positive in the good."

"My middle school year I was in a band called Trap In The City... My band was cool it was fun, funny, we had [our] ups and downs but we were still together. My middle school family we had split apart because high school came but it's okay we still talk [our] band is still together as a family."

"I would like to learn more about people who used music as a voice to be heard."

CONCLUSION

While this is a study in progress, these are emerging themes:

- *Reality Pedagogy* will not work if you take shortcuts. There is no quick way to get meaningful and lasting results in student learning.
- *Cogenerative dialogues* are invaluable in building trust – a critical, and instinctual, ingredient in learning processes.
- *Cultural production* within the context of *cogens* allows teacher and students to create a classroom that looks and sounds like the combined experiences of its co-inhabitants.
- Utilizing these methodologies could potentially expand the impact and specialization of American music education – combining the old and new – by encouraging more children to offer their musical experiences as a valued source of knowledge.

References

Doyle, J. (2014). Predictors of Culturally Relevant Attitudes and Expectations of Urban Music Educators in the USA. *Music Education Research*, 16(4), 436-453. Retrieved April 3, 2017.

Doyle, J. (2014). Cultural Relevance in Urban Music Education: A Synthesis of the Literature. *Applications of Research in Music Education*, 32(2), 44-51.

Emdin, C. (2016). *For White Folks Who Teach in the Hood...and the Rest of Ya'll Too*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Fiese, R. K., & DeCarbo, N. J. (1995). Urban Music Education: The Teachers' Perspective. *Music Educators Journal*, 81(6), 27-31. Retrieved March 3, 2017.

Gaztambide-Fernández, Rubén A. 2011. Musicking in the city: Reconceptualizing urban music education as cultural practice. *Action, Criticism, and Theory for Music Education* 10(1): 15-46.

Kelly-McHale, J. (2013). The Influence of Music Teacher Beliefs and Practices on the Expression of Musical Identity. *Journal of Research in Music Education*, 61(2), 195-216. Retrieved March 16, 2017, from <http://about.istor.org/terms>

Phillips, D. K., & Carr, K. (2010). *Becoming A Teacher Through Action Research*. New York: Routledge